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REMEDIAL MEASURES TO ATTAIN REASONABLE EVENT AND SPATIAL COVERAGE, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE RURAL AREAS

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REFERENCE

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This document presents and discusses proposals addressed to English-speaking African Countries on topical issues related to the improvement and/or expansion of civil registration systems and vital statistics collection in the continent focussing on rural areas.

2. The following topics have been singled out for discussion, namely:

I. Agencies responsible for the civil registration system

II. Special provisions for the rural areas

III. Civil registration documents

IV. Training of the civil registration personnel

V. Logistic support

VI. Motivation and enlightenment of the public

VII. Legislation

II. AGENCIES RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEM

Centralized and decentralized structures

3. In English-speaking countries there is usually a national registration office in the administrative capital that is responsible for the supervision and co-ordination of all registration units in the country. The issue of birth and death certificates within the various civil registration systems is either centralized, that is, a function of only the central registry, with other local registration centres responsible for only notification of events, or decentralized.

4. For example, in Uganda until 1977, the central agency located in Kampala was the only registry responsible for the issuance of birth and death certificates. However, because of the large land area and substantial population size of the country, this arrangement created problems for persons living outside Kampala who had to travel long distances to register their vital events. Also, the staff of the central registry was over-marked, as they had not only to cope with the enormous requests they received from the public but also had to handle the task of data storage and retrieval. In view of these problems, in 1977 the system was decentralized.

5. Swaziland is another country which runs a centralized system of birth and death registration. However, because of her smaller population size and land area, it would appear that similar problems in Uganda do not exist here. The local registration agencies through the Ministry of Local Administration collects and processes the registration forms, although central registration and custody of the completed forms or issuance of certificates are the responsibility of the Registrar Generals Office located in the capital.

6. From the above discussion it can be concluded that a decentralized system whereby the responsibility for the issue of certificates is given to not only the central agency but also the second, third, etc.. tier administrative sturcture such as district or provincial registries has much to recommend it because it could reduce some of the difficulties that stand in the way of persons who would like to register their vital events and thus enhance coverage. This applies especially to a country with a large land area and population size. As part of the administrative arrangements for this set up, birth and death certificates could be stored at both the sub-national registration centres in order to facilitate future searches.

Administrative structure.

7. With respect to the administrative organization of civil registration in English-speaking countries, the agencies to which the civil registration offices are attached vary. For example in Kenya, Uganda, Swaziland and Malawi, it is a Registrar General's Office, in most cases, located within the Justice Ministry; in Sierra Leone, the Ministry of Health.

8. In this connection, an area of continuing debate, especially in English-speaking countries, is the agency location of the civil registration structure in order for it to effectively perform its many functions, namely: legal, medical and statistical. Various government agencies, for example, the Ministry of Health, the Registrar - General's Office and the Bureau of Statistics, have in some countries, at one time or the other, been the location of the system.

9. Ghana is a classic case. At the start of the civil registration system from 1895 to 1951, the Medical Department was the agency responsible for the civil registration functions; from 1952 to 1965, the Registrar-General's Office took over, and from 1965 to 1972, the registration office was located in the Ministry of local

Government, with the Government Statistician exercising some authority over the statistical function. After 1972 the Central Bureau of Statistics took over completely, with the Registry of Births and Deaths operating directly under its control.

10. In the context of the discussion above, a major problem of civil registration systems in African countries is the co-ordination of various agencies involved in the work of civil registration in African countries. This is especially the case where more than one agency is involved in the registration and the statistical processing of vital events.

11. One method of achieving co-ordination and fruitful collaboration among agencies involved in the work of civil registration and vital statistics is for the formation of a National Committee comprising representatives of the various ministries and institutions. Under the National Committee, sub-committees such as on training, enlightenment and methodology could also be established (IIVRS, n.d. pp. 235-242)

12. A general function of the National Committee should include relating the activities and functions of diverse agencies or organizations that perform civil registration assignments and vital statistics collection, processing, analysis, publication and dissemination so that they "work, as a co-ordinated whole, avoiding both wasteful overlapping of effort and important gaps..." (IIVRS, n.d.)

Conclusions

13. In this section, the role of several agencies in the work of civil registration and vital statistics in African countries has been noted. In this context, the need for the co-ordination of the functions of these agencies could be best served by the creation of National Committees, on which should be the representatives of these agencies.

14. About the question of centralization and decentralization of important functions of the civil registration, expecially the issue of certificates, it was argued that a decentralized structure has much to recommend it. The ability of local registration offices to issue birth and death certificates, considerably reduces the problems of informants and other interested persons, who require the records. It should be pointed out, however, that this entails some administrative re-organization.

15. The administrative structure of the civil registration system at the sub-national level should, if possible, operate within the existing administrative system. The efficient operation of the overall system depends on a strong effective and well-functioning Central National Civil Registration Office.

III. SPECIAL PROVISIONS FOR THE RURAL AREAS

16. That rural areas are served by fewer civil registration facilities compared with urban areas is a well known problem of the civil registration systems in African countries. For example, it has been observed with respect to Nigeria, Africa's most populous country that "registration centres hardly exist in, villages; in other words, the system has never been brought within the easy reach of the ordinary folk." (Umoh, 1972). A reason for this trend is the existence of extensive small rural settlements spread out over large land surfaces which creates problems pertaining to transportation, terrain and logistics for the provision of civil registration facilities to such dispersed localities.

17. Also, the prevalence of illiteracy and the lack of appreciation of the importance of vital statistics and records-since in these socio-economic environment they rarely have any uses-are other characteristics of rural areas in African countries which pose special problems for the introduction and/or expansion of civil registration systems.

18. Given these and other considerations, it is imperative to devote special effort, time and strategies, to the problems of the rural areas, in any programme to expand the civil registration system in Africa. In this context, consideration must be given to the methods of getting the facilities of the civil registration to the majority of the population in these areas. Among the options that could be considered are the following: (a) upgrading of civil registration infrastructure such as recruitment of staff, opening of new local registration offices at lowest administrative levels; (b) experimentation with some form of active registration system, (c) motivation and enlightenment of the public.

(a) Upgrading of civil registration infrastructure

19. A fundamental principle for the improvement and/or expansion of the civil registration system is that its facilities should be made available to the vast majority of the population, with no unnecessary inconvenience encountered when informants wish to register vital events. For rural areas this means that the facilities

of the registration system should be extended to the smallest administrative units such as villages, hillside settlements, sub-locations, cattle posts etc.., at the minimum possible cost.

20. In view of especially cost considerations, use should be made of the existing administrative structure (personnel and office space) with field facilities in rural areas. Specifically, it would be economical to utilize Government, central or local, who receive salaries for the performance of their assigned jobs rather than bring in new personnel. For this purpose, literate and conscientious members of the community such as school teachers, village maternity assistants, village midwives, chiefs and health inspectors could be used to perform registration functions on a part-time basis. Though there are certain disadvantages to the employment of such persons on a part-time basis, especially because they will assign higher priority to their main jobs,it has been shown, for example, in Kenya, that with some encouragement, enlightenment and training, they could be motivated to perform registration functions fairly well. Thus, the payment of some form of honorarium is one form of motivation that should be considered.

(b) Experimentation with an active system

21. Another option which should be seriously considered in any programme to improve the civil registration in the rural areas of African countries is the replacement of the passive with an active system. Unlike the passive system in a conventional civil registration set-up, whereby informants have to go themselves to designated registration offices in order to have their vital events registered, in an active system, the civil registration officials go out to canvass the events.

22. A typical active system could take the following form. Full-time (or part-time) civil registration officials establish contacts with persons in the community, who by virtual of their work meet members of the rural public and should normally be aware of local events such as births and deaths. Such persons could be,for example, social welfare workers, health personnel, midwives, village maternity assistants and chiefs. Their functions will involve informing the itinerant registration officials, during their periodic visits to villages about the occurrence of vital events. On the basis of this information, the registration officials sets into motion, the machinery to effect the registration of the vital events.

(c) Campaign to motivate and enlighten the rural public

23. The campaign to motivate and enlighten the public (See SectionVII) should pay particular attention to the rural areas. This is because in these areas among some of the major barriers to registration such as the following: illiteracy, superstitious belief, problems of transport and communication because of difficult terrain and dispersed settlements, need to overcome before any headway to achieving appreciable coverage could be attained.

24. The enlightenment campaign could take into account the special problems of these areas. For this reason, special programmes should be arranged which will be directed to persons here, especially the illiterates. To achieve success, the talks, the discussion and the posters should be in the major language spoken in the area.

Conclusions

25. The crux of the problems of the civil registration systems in African countries centres around improving and extending coverage in the rural areas. In essence therefore most of the issues discussed in this present document have relevance for the problems of these areas.

26. However, in this section, we have identified three main topics for discussion, namely - upgrading of the civil registration infrastructure, institution of an active system and motivation and enlightenment of the public. It is recommended that to minimise costs use should be made of the existing local administrative structure (personnel and office facilities) as much as possible. Also, active system, whereby civil registration officials go out to canvass vital events rather than wait in their offices for informants is also suggested. Finally, a campaign to motivate and enlighten the rural public about the importance and benefits of vital records and statistics is strongly recommended to be included among the strategies to improve and expand registration in these areas.

IV. CIVIL REGISTRATION DOCUMENTS

27. In the performance of the various civil registration functions a number of different documents are used. These include:

- Declaration (or notice) of births, deaths and marriages
- Statistical report form
- Declaration forms for late registration
- Others such as indexes of the registers, forms for periodic summary of information for statistical reporting, the civil registration legislation and rules and regulations.

28. This section examines the most important of these registration documents such as the registers, the declaration (or notice) and statistical report forms.

(a) Registration Records

29. The registration records are legal documents used for the registration of vital events to conform to legal and statistical requirements according to the laws and regulations pertaining to civil registration system. Two types can be identified, namely - (a) book-type and (b) individual records which can be bound together to form a loose-leaf register.

30. With book-type registration records, registers, events are entered in accordance with the time of reporting and/or occurrence. The date of reporting and/or occurrence may be used as the basis for filing and indexing. It is also a usual practice for a separate index to be compiled at the end of the year, arranged by name, which is used for search and reference purpose. An advantage of this type of register is that it ensures greater security of the records.

31. The second type of registers which are compiled from individual records are compiled in the following ways. About three copies of the registration record for each vital event, births and deaths, could be completed simultaneously - the original and perhaps carbon copies. The original is usually retained in the main registration office for use for the subsequent compilation of the register, and the other copies could be given to the informants such as the parents or relatives as the first proof of registration and to the statistical agency. While this type of register simplifies filing and indexing, it has grave security risks.

32. A general recommendation concerning registration documents is that a separate book should be maintained for each distinct vital event. (United Nations, 1973, para. 343) This practice would enhance accuracy in the recording of vital events and promote the completeness and accuracy of the reporting of the various items.

33. Uniform national standards relating to the contents and types of registers used in the country must be established by the agency responsible for co-ordination of the civil registration system and vital statistics compilation. This will ensure the collection of a minimum number of subject matter fields - the priority topics - for all population groups and geographical sub-divisions. Also this practice simplifies the training of registration personnel and the drawing up of instruction manuals for use in the administration of the civil registration system. Standardization is best achieved by the formation of a central (national) co-ordination agency controlling the printing and issuance of the various forms (UN, 1973 paragraph 344).

5b) Declaration or notification form and/or statistical report forms

34. In certain countries, particulars required by law and regulation to be supplied by the informants are not entered directly into the standard registration documents but are compiled from preliminary questionnaires, the declaration or notification documents. For example, in a hospital, clinic or health centre, when a birth or death occurs that is attended to by a midwife or doctor, a form containing the facts of occurrence of the event and other pertinent information may be completed and sent to the registration office for formal registration.

35. In rural areas, where there are no health institutions, notification forms could be completed by community contracts, such as the village traditional birth attendants, school teachers and social welfare officers. On his periodic visits, the registration officer should take the opportunity to check on the completeness and accuracy of each of the completed notification forms, sometimes even by re-interview. The verified notification forms should form the sources for the registration of the events and the statistical report.

36. The original medical certificate certifying to the cause(s) of death from hospitals could be forwarded to the registration office with the relevant notification forms. The registration officer should, in transcribing the information on the notification form to the registration record enter only broad cause(s) of death, differentiating only between "natural causes" and"accidental and violent causes". Later the original medical certificate and the notification form should both be forwarded to the agency responsible for compiling for statistical purposes, which will code and tabulate in more details.

37. The use of notification or declaration forms results in an addition of a phase in the registration process. Its main advantage is that it offers another opportunity for checking the accuracy and completeness of entries before formal registration, thereby minimizing corrections to the legal records. On the other hand, the practice can sometimes adversely affect the completeness of coverage of the registration, as persons issued with the notification fail to go to registration centres to have their vital events formally registered.

V. TRAINING OF THE CIVIL REGISTRATION PERSONNEL

38. Training of the civil registration personnel should form an integral element of any programme to improve and/or expand the civil registration system in African countries, for two reasons. Firstly because one of the activities of such programmes pertains to the strengthening of the head office and sub-national registries and usually involves recruitment of additional staff who obviously have to be trained. Secondly, programmes to improve and/or expand the civil registration system usually comprise of the introduction of new methodologies and orientation, about which all staff members, old and new, have to be educated. However, the training needs of the civil registration system should not stop at these objectives, but ought to be inculcated as part and parcel of the whole programme, since civil registration is an ongoing activity.

39. The basic training programme of civil registration personnel should serve to make them thoroughly conversant with their duties and responsibilities as spelled out in the civil registration laws and regulations. Among the duties and responsibilities of registration personnel which should be stressed are the following:

(a) to ensure that all registrable vital events are registered in accordance with existing laws and regulations governing the events;

(b) to properly certify and index such recorded vital events;

(c) to ensure that information provided for statistical purposes are accurate and timely; and

(d) to play a leadership role in the education and enlightenment of the public.

40. The training programme of civil registration personnel should be carefully planned, with particular attention paid to the following aspects:

(a) the drafting and finalization of the basic documents to be used for the training of the various levels of staff

(b) meticulous selection of the trainers and trainees for each of the levels of civil registration staff

(c) decision should be made about whether the basic training documents for the lower civil registration personnel should be translated into local languages and whether the training should be conducted in the same language

(d) careful examination of the timing, periodicity and venue of the training sessions and

(e) questions about the payment and amount of honorarium, if any.

41. Apart from providing training programmes to the staff of civil registration systems, there is need to include courses on civil registration and vital statistics in the training programmes of personnel from other agencies that perform civil registration functions, such as doctors, midwives and traditional birth attendants. Senior officials of the civil registration could help to prepare the training materials and if possible present them at these training sessions.

42. In the rest of the paper, the following topics will be discussed in more detail: (a) Drafting and finalization of the basic documents; (b) Selection of trainers and trainees; and (c) administrative arrangement about the training sessions.

(a) Drafting and finalization of the basic training documents

43. To standardize the training of the various civil registration personnel, uniform training materials for various cadres of staff, should be prepared. For the task of preparation of the materials the assistance of mass communication and media experts, from say, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting should be sought. The experts should work on the basic material prepared by specialists in civil registration to transform them into forms easily understood by the public.

44. Training materials should be prepared separately for different cadres of civil registration personnal: for example: (1) the senior regular staff of the civil registration agency, (2) the junior regular staff of the civil registration agency, (3) the staff of other agencies such as local administration, health and social welfare, and (4) community contact in rural areas: such as village traditional birth attendants, school teachers and village chiefs.

45. The training material for category (4), some of whom may be illiterate, should, where possible, be prepared in the local languages of the areas where the training will take place.

(b) Selection of trainers and trainees

46. The training programme should cater for, as far as possible, all persons who perform civil registration assignments, at both part-time and full-time basis - the regular staff of the civil registration agency, staff of other agencies who co-operate to perform civil registration assignments in the field, and also community level workers.

47. The bulk of the training duties will be done by the senior staff of the agency responsible for civil registration, who should play a pivotal role in the preparation of the documents. They should assist in the training of all cadres of the civil registration personnel. The senior staff could train the junior staff members of the civil registration agency as well as the senior staff of the other agencies that participate in performing registration functions in the field. The senior staff of these agencies could assist the senior staff of the civil registration agency to train both the junior field staff and community contacts.

(c) Administrative arrangements

48. The planning and implementation of the training programme usually entails a number of integrated and co-ordinated administrative arrangements. Since this activity involves staff of several other agencies, there is need for meticulous co-ordination of effort and co-operation. This can best be done through a technical sub-committee on training, on which should be included the major agencies that would be involved in the implementation of the training programme.

49. The training committee should discuss and decide upon technical issues especially the content of the training programme, as well as, the timetable, the venues, release of staff members from agencies for the training and the payment of honorarium, if any.

Conclusions

50. The planning and implementation of a training programme for persons performing civil registration functions should form integral elements of the strategies to improve and/or expand the civil registration systems in African countries. Training should be conceived not as an adhoc but a continuous activity. For this programme, standard training materials for different cadres of registration personnel should be prepared, ideally with the assistance of mass media experts.

51. The senior staff of the civil registration agency should play pivotal roles in the planning as well as the implementation. To enlist the co-operation of other government agencies as well as to foster co-operation, a sub-committee on training should be formed to guide various activities such as discussion on the contents of the training materials, the time-table, venue and financial arrangements.

VI. LOGISTIC SUPPORT

52. Many civil registration activities require some form of logistic support for their implementation. The main activities involved and the resources that the Registrar's Office, civil registration centres and certain co-operating agencies need to provide for their implementation will be briefly considered in this section.

1. Main activities requiring logistic support

53. The operation of a civil registration system involves the movement of many types of documents and forms. Some of the various categories of documents used to by civil registration systems such as registration records, declaration (or notification) and certificates of births, deaths and marriages, statistical report form and declaration form for late registration, have already been discussed in section IV above. To this list should also be added other documents such as instructions and circulars, civil registration laws and regulations and publicity and enlightenment brochures.

54. The placing of orders, taking of delivery and distribution of these various documents are usually the responsibility of the head office. This office has to ensure that enough documents are printed and the required numbers sent to various registration centres in the country. This office should have the capability to response to request for additional supplies, if and when required by sub-national centres.

55. At the sub-national registration centres, the copies or originals of registration documents such as notification or declaration forms and birth and death certificates, when completed, should be sent to the central registration office for completion, distribution or storage, and in cases of statistical documents, for processing and dissemination. Control forms should be used for the transmission of each of these documents to ensure that none gets lost in transit, and if this occurs, to be able to trace them. In this connection, flow charts describing the stages of transmission of these documents should be prepared for each form.

56. Another activity requiring logistic support is the administrative supervision of sub-national registration centres. Sub-national registration centres should usually send to the national office, periodic, say monthly, report summarising their activities. Such reports should be sent on time, and, when received, the responsible officers at the central office should examine them and take any action, if needed, before filing.

57. One other activity that requires logistic support at the sub-national level, is the supply of registration documents to institutions that participate in the registration system such as hospitals and clinics. Proper record need to be maintained to monitor documents sent and received.

58. Arrangements about transportation and transmission of documents should be made for civil registration centres responsible for providing rural registration centres under their control with such documents. In addition, civil registration offices at both national and local levels should be supplied with cabinets in which civil registration documents should be carefully filed.

Conclusions

59. From the discussion above, it has been clearly shown that a civil registration system cannot effectively operate if some control is not maintained with respect to the movements of various documents. The major responsibility for the monitoring of the flow of various documents is the staff of the head office of the registration, which should have a section within its administrative division for logistics.

VII. MOTIVATION AND EDUCATION OF THE PUBLIC

60. A programme aimed at the motivation and education of the public should form an integral component of any project to improve civil registration in Africa. The justification of such a programme, factors which can help to motivate the public and measures to be implemented in such a programme are the topics that will be discussed in this section.

Justification of the programme to motivate and educate the public

61. The lack of co-operation on the part of the public to register their vital events is among one of the major shortcomings of the current civil registration systems in African countries. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, vital records have virtually no uses in especially the rural areas of most African countries. Consequently, most of the population is unaware of the benefits and usefulness of vital records and statistics and therefore has little motivation to register their vital events.

62. Secondly, problems of transportation and communication act as disincentives to the public especially those in dispersed rural settlements to travel to registration offices to register their vital events. In this connection, it is pertinent to point out that the existing sparse distribution of registration facilities in most of rural Africa means that informants have to travel long distances, over difficult terrains in order to report the occurrence of vital events at the nearest registration offices.

63. Thirdly, a non-traditional activity such as the registration of vital events, is not initially, readily accepted by a vast majority of the population.

64. For these and other reasons, it is necessary to introduce a programme geared to educating the public about the benefits and usefulness of vital records and statistics to motivate them to register.

Factors to motivate the public

65. An important factor that should motivate the public to register their vital events is to make the uses of vital records obligatory in certain cases, such as, as proof of age on first admission to school for children, issuance of passports, proof of death to acquire rights to inheritance and payment of insurance. It should be observed that most of these uses of vital records are primarily of concern to the urban population and certain groups in rural areas such as civil servants or teachers.

66. With particular reference to the rural population, uses pertaining to the rights of the utilization of primary health care facilities appear more relevant. Thus in this context, the production of birth certificates should be made obligatory for using post maternity care centres. However, a rigid application of the legal rules should not be insisted in these cases. In particular care must be exercised so that health facilities are not denied to children who due to no fault of their parents could not obtain birth certificates.

Measures to be implemented

67. Ideally, a programme to educate and motivate the public should be formulated and implemented by the civil registration office with the assistance of mass media experts drawn from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Moreover, a sub-technical committee on enlightenment should operate under the aegis of the national committee of civil registration to guide and monitor the programme.

68. The enlightenment programme should be designed with due regard paid to local conditions and circumstances, such as regional levels of educational attainment and the level of understanding of a common language. Explicitly special programme should be designed catering for various population groups, for example, rural and semi-rural, urban and rural, literate and illiterate.

69. The activities of the enlightenment campaign should be carried out at both national and sub-national levels. At the national level and sub-national levels, newspapers can be utilized to capture the attention of the public. At the local level, while radio broadcasts could be used, alternative forms of spreading information involving contact with the population could be experimented with. The enlightenment campaign should be an active undertaking, with community workers (e.g., health, sanitation, social welfare and education personnel) along with local registration officials intimately involved.

Conclusions

70. The programme to motivate and educate the public should occupy a central position in programmes to improve and expand the civil registration system in Africa. This applies especially to programmes geared towards the rural areas, where inertia towards civil registration development would exist given the special geographical characteristics of these areas and also the lack of relevance of civil records in these environments.

71. All available means of communication should be mobilized when implementing the programme. The communication programme should aim at explaining to the public what civil registration is, its objectives and the advantages it can have for both individuals and the country.

72. The motivation and enlightenment campaign should be co-ordinated by the National Civil Registration Office aided by a communication committee.

VIII. LEGAL PROVISION

Introduction

73. The legal obligation to register a vital event is the cornerstone of the entire civil registration system. This is because when registration is voluntary rather than compulsory. There can be no assurance of complete or accurate vital records or statistics (UN, 1973, para 293).

74. However civil registration development during the colonial era in Africa usually involved piecemeal extensions of compulsory registration laws. To be sure, in a few countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Mauritius and Seychelles, the institution of civil registration systems for the whole country date back to the nineteenth century or earlier. But in the majority of the countries this development occurred only within the past two decades.

75. During the colonial era, compulsory registration was usually introduced for the nationals of the metropolitan states, and later extended to non-indigenous groups, such as Indians and Pakistanis. In certain countries, the indigenous population of certain areas were allowed to register their births or deaths but on a voluntary rather than on a compulsory basis.

76. Consequently, one of the basic infrastructure and prerequisites for the development of civil registration systems in many African countries after political independence have been introduction of compulsory civil registration laws applicable to all population groups in the country, since most inherited fragmented systems, partly compulsory and partly voluntary.

77. In a review of the legal aspects of civil registration systems in Africa about the mid 1970 (Apedekpo, 1976) the following were identified as some of their main shortcomings:

- That the legislations governing the functions of the vital statistics systems in African countries were generally out of date and limited in scope because some of the existing laws were enacted some years back and also because they did not permit the proper fulfilment of the functions described by the system.

- Secondly, in most cases the vital registration laws were defective and needed to be up-dated to fulfil their functions taking into account the modern needs of various African countries.

Legal basis for Civil Registration Systems

78. It is against this background that the legal basis for civil registration systems in Africa are considered. That a proper legal basis is indispensable to the operation of a civil registration system is now a well established fact. Such laws should serve the following purposes:

(a) The compulsory basis of a civil registration system ensures the complete coverage of vital events. The civil registration law should provide the rationale and the nature of mandatory registration, as well as stipulate penalties.

(b) The law should provide assurances to persons whose vital events are being registered that the information collected will be treated confidentially. This will instil confidence in the public about the registration system to make them willing to have their vital events collected.

(c) The law assigns responsibilities and duties for the operation of the system among agencies, the public and civil registration personnels by describing what events are to be registered, and how they should be registered, persons responsible for providing notification and information etc.

(d) The legal requirements for the compulsory registration of vital events is important in a modernizing community because it safeguards human rights with respect to social status and benefits. (United Nations, 1973, para 274).

Contents of Model Civil Registration Laws for birth and death

79. To be able to evaluate civil registration laws in African countries, the content on a"model" civil registration law is reproduced below:

Sections

1	Definitions
2	Office of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
3	Rules and Regulations
4	Appointment of registrars and other civil registration personnel
5	Duties of Registrars and other senior civil registration personnel
6	Contents of Registration Records
7	Delayed Registration of Birth
8	Death Registration
9	Delayed Registration of Death
10	Statistical Reports
11	Amendment of Vital Records
12	Disclosures of information from vital records
13	Fees
14	Persons required to keep records
15	Penalties
16	Repeal

80. The civil registration legislation should provide clear, up-to-date definitions of the various events, such as live birth, still birth, death and marriages, that it covers. Standard definitions of these events are provided in the publications of relevant international organizations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations. Adaptations could be made to these definitions to take into account the special conditions of the country. Other items that might be considered under definition, include, description of various posts and structure of the civil registration system.

81. A clear and precise description of the office of the registrar of births and deaths within the civil service hierarchy should be provided. Reference could also be made to the various grades of staff which should constitute the civil registration system in the country.

82. Another important detail that should be included in the laws is definitions of the functions of the senior staff of the registration system especially the registrar as well as assistant registrars or deputy registrars.

83. The civil registration legislation should also deal with some of the mechanics of registration, by specifying, for example, methods of current, delayed or late registrations and the time periods within which each should occur. The compulsory nature of the registration system should also be clearly spelled out.

84. At this juncture, it should be pointed out that the contents of a civil registration legislation present some difficulties. While it is important to include in the law the major elements of the registration system, however, the spelling out in fine detail of these major elements might at a later stage cause some problems. For example, one area where detail exposition in the law might cause problems later is the contents of the vital records as additions or deletions of items at a later date would entail amendment.

85. In this connexion, it is suggested that in addition to the law, there should also be the rules and regulations of the civil registration. In the law should be included fairly immutable elements of the registration systems, while the rules and regulations, which can be changed by simple administrative processes, contain those aspects of the registration system that should respond to modernization and other changes such as the content of the registration forms and the distribution of functions among the various agencies involved in registration.

Conclusions

86. A review of the existing civil registration legislation should be among one of the major activities that African countries planning to improve and/or expand their systems should undertake since most inherited from the colonial era fragmented systems partly compulsory and partly optional. This is because a civil registration legislation which extends compulsory registration to all population groups and, at the same time, reflects and responses to change, is the cornerstone of the civil registration system.

87. The laws, rules and regulations governing the operation of the civil registration system should be included in two sets of documents: the law and the rules and regulations. The civil registration legislation, whose content can only be changed by legislative amendments, should contain those major elements of the civil registration process which are fairly immutable; while the rules and regulations, which can be changed by simple administrative processes, should cover those elements of the registration process which are expected to response to changing circumstances.

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